

Sermon Text for May 4, 2025

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John 3:14-21 Coming into the Light

Core Affirmation: Because God is actively drawing people to Jesus, the world will be transformed.

What in the world is God doing??

What is God doing in the world?

These are two completely different questions. One is really an emotional statement and the other a question that opens us to seeing, experiencing and joining God's activity.

Thirty years ago, the first thing I learned about ministry is that God is fascinated with people.

God is insanely interested in the vast array of people and their stories.

Because someone took notice of me and my life, they invited me to learn about Jesus.

Together, we saw Jesus, in the Gospels,
pause to listen to and enter into the unfolding narratives of relatable people.

Then, I began to be fascinated by people.

The Spirit of God caused me to begin to see that our stories- in the light of the Gospel- are a portal to knowing the God of all creation.

If we want to understand what God is doing in the world, we can begin with the people God interacts with. And in John's Gospel, Nicodemus gives us a glimpse into that divine movement.

Pray.

Before I read John 3:14-21, you'll want to know a few things about our main character.

Who is Nicodemus?

- 3:1 says he is a “Leader of the Jews”
- And a Pharisee
- In 3:10, Jesus calls him a teacher of Israel

And, when Nicodemus approaches Jesus, he speaks on behalf of the Jews.

Saying, “Rabbi, WE know...”

Jesus validates/ recognizes Nicodemus’ representative posture.

In 3:7, Jesus responds using the plural: YOU all must be born from above.

In this face to face conversation with Nicodemus, the whole Jewish nation hovers in the background, always on the mind of Jesus

And still, We learn in John 3:2 that Nicodemus comes *alone* to Jesus at *night*.

Some might think that because he comes alone,

Nicodemus is a bumbling, resistant figure opposed to God’s work among the Hebrews.

But, what if we saw something different in Nicodemus’ actions?

I envision a man committed to righteousness and doing the will of God, he is a Pharisee after all.

Who’s to say he’s not earnest or even hopeful, looking forward to the day of justice for God’s people?

Nicodemus is probably smart.

He might even have a sense of humor.

He may have loved well- his parents, wife, family, neighbors.

We meet him just at the point when he witnessed something troubling in the Temple court yard.

See, John put the story together this way: Jesus cleared the temple of buyers and sellers of sacrifice animals at the beginning of his account.

And, so, What does Nicodemus make of the ruckus Jesus caused?

I imagine he's perplexed, maybe even intrigued.

Curious, but being aware of the danger

He is tentative to be seen.

By other Pharisees, perhaps.

Or was he tentative to meet Jesus? He did seem to have a temper at the Temple.

But, Nicodemus bravely does what reasonable men do: he seeks out the source and asks him directly.

Nicodemus comes under cover of darkness,
and Jesus speaks to him in a way that reveals light.

And in this moment, Jesus offers not just answers—but an invitation to something greater.

Jesus the Word is the best way to understand God's (sometimes strange) activity in the world!

Can we see ourselves in Nicodemus' life?

So many of us embody roles like him:

We're past and present Elders-with-a-capital-E, deacons, trustees, teachers, ministry leaders, office managers.

And we're lower case E elders- who've accumulated wisdom and joy over the years.

If you can relate to Nicodemus, who are the groups of people Jesus sees hovering behind you?

Those folks who may not be in the pew this morning, but who you love and cherish?

What in the world is God doing among and in them?

Read John 3:14-21

Jesus leans in so Nicodemus can see his eyes by candlelight.

He raises his eyebrows and whispers... if I were Nicodemus, shivers would be running down my spine.

God **gave** and **sent** the Son.

Verse 16: As a mark of God's love, "he gave the/ his only Son"

In order to explain the giving of Jesus, John uses 2 images: Moses' saving staff and light in the dark.

First, in verse 14, Jesus compares himself to Moses' staff

God formed it into the shape of a snake.

He gave it the power to heal snake bitten Israelites who wandered and complained.

Jesus quotes Numbers 21 saying,

Both the staff and the Son of Man, meaning himself, are lifted up-
so that people would not come to an end, but would live.

Whether glancing at the lifted snake-staff or

Believing in the Son lifted on the Cross,

God provided a way for people to not come to an end,
but to live on and on and on.

Looking into the future, Jesus explains what he did in the temple by explaining his death on the cross.

The second way he describes God's gift is in verse 19.

Jesus paints a picture of God giving Light,
saying light has come into the world.

Jesus continues, the deeds people will be illuminated- seen- even if they would prefer to remain hidden.

It can be a painful and difficult process to be exposed: the world is full of judgment.

Jesus says some will do it, and others will not.

Some will come to the light. Others will not.

Some will come to Him. Others will not.

We must not mix up coming to church with coming to the Light of Jesus.

Nicodemus comes in the night, to the light of Jesus.

Make no mistake, Nicodemus comes to Jesus, to the light,
under cover of the dark/ night.

This whole conversation happens- by candlelight.

It's an ironic, yet a profound truth about how things work with God:

God gave His light in dark places.

And so, Nicodemus is named, exposed, known in the Temple and the early church
as the Jew who sought out Jesus,

Who later, made a case for Jesus among his Jewish accusers,
and who provided 100 pounds of burial ointments for Jesus' dead body.

God gave Jesus, sending him into the world, to the Temple, and to Nicodemus,
And his true deeds were recorded in Scripture forever.

Continuing... verse 17 adds "God SENT the Son"

Because Jesus is sent by the Father

Being SENT is fundamentally part of his Divine identity

Being sent is fundamentally part of the Trinity.

And so, it follows,

We- his followers- are also sent people.

To be a believer, is to be sent.

Jesus' words to Nicodemus weren't just about understanding—
they were about transformation.

Throughout John's Gospel, we see people responding to that light by stepping forward into God's call.

John packs his Gospel with stories of individuals who are drawn to Jesus and then sent with the Light of God: In the first 4 chapters we meet:

Andrew who finds Simon,

Philip who finds Nathaneal,

Mary his mother who commands the servants at the wedding

He himself acts and speaks in the Temple and many believe in his Name.

Nicodemus

And then the unnamed woman at the well who invites her whole town to meet Jesus.

So, John's answer to

What in the world is God up to?? Is this:

Nicodemus wasn't the last person to be drawn into God's light.

Even today, God is still at work,

drawing people to Jesus and inviting them to step forward in faith.

Linda Younger has experienced this firsthand, and she's going to share a recent story with us.

When she's finished, I will lead us in a prayer which will guide us to the light of Jesus and listen for his invitation.